

3.3. Local Seroprevalence Studies Conducted by the Tennessee Department of Health

3.3.1. Introduction

The HIV Family of Surveys (HFS) is a group of surveys designed by CDC to monitor HIV prevalence in select groups, particularly groups at high risk of infection with HIV, including prisoners, clients of drug treatment centers, the homeless and clients of TB and STD clinics and women's health clinics. The surveys provide limited information regarding seroprevalence in high risk populations. Results of these surveys should not be used to draw conclusions about the general population, nor about clients of all similar clinics. Primary objectives were to identify changes over time in the prevalence of HIV in specific high risk populations in order to better target prevention efforts.

Demographic and other information was collected, together with HIV test results, and transferred to Health Department data bases. In the case of STD clinics, separate surveys were conducted in STD clinics in Memphis, Nashville and Chattanooga over the course of two to five years. These blinded surveys included 300 consecutive patients per quarter provided they were making an initial visit for any sexually-transmitted disease and had not visited the clinic in the prior three months. Excluded from the survey were all patients seeking HIV-related services only, such as testing, diagnosis or treatment. Patients were included if they requested both STD and HIV services.

It is important to note that all seroprevalence studies are blinded such that no link can be made between individuals tested and test results. Local surveys included here use a remaining portion of blood specimens routinely taken from patients who come to STD Clinics and other sites for services unrelated to HIV. These specimens are subjected to blinded HIV testing with patient identifiers removed.

Access to different subgroups for conducting unlinked seroprevalence studies is limited to settings where voluntary HIV counseling and testing is available to all clients and blood is drawn routinely from all clients for a purpose other than HIV testing. Data from each survey provide an estimate of the proportion of individuals in a population who are infected at a given time (prevalence) and the distribution of HIV infection among a clinic population during a study period.

Characteristics of the surveys include:

Geographic scale - conducted in three cities (Nashville, Chattanooga and Memphis) at STD clinics; conducted statewide in prisons; and conducted in Memphis only, for drug treatment centers, TB clinics, homeless clinics, and women's health clinics.